

# The Partner

A monthly newsletter to our  
community partners from  
Sheriff John D. Idleburg



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## A Message from Sheriff John D. Idleburg

Community engagement is the focus of this month's newsletter, and it would not be a newsletter about community engagement without participation from its readers.

What is community engagement to you? We want to know!

- Email us at [sheriff@lakecountylil.gov](mailto:sheriff@lakecountylil.gov) with "Community Engagement" as the subject
- Comment on our [Facebook](#) page post about this newsletter
- Tweet us at [@LakeCollSheriff](#) using the hashtag #CommunityEngagement
- Tag us in your Instagram Story [@LakeCollSheriff](#)

We are excited to hear from you!

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## Community Voice

We asked Lake County community member and Waukegan School Board President Brandon Ewing about what he thinks would enable community involvement in real criminal justice reform, and he shared his thoughts below.



I would like to see mechanisms that provide information in simple language. Many of the conversations around reform and restorative justice are discussed in a way that limits access and engagement from the average person. It is also essential to define what “real” criminal justice reform is and is not. I believe that the language around criminal justice reform varies from person to person, so it is vital that we seek to gain a common language and understanding. There also must be actionable steps for those who get involved with this work. What do you need me to do? When do you need me to do it? Who do I need to involve? How does my involvement contribute to the overall goals of criminal justice reform here in Lake County? I believe these conversations are a step in the right direction to establish the mechanisms and relationships needed to carry this work forward.

**BRANDON EWING**

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## **Why is Community Engagement Important to Lake County Criminal Justice System Stakeholders?**

History shows that some of society's best ideas to improve how the criminal justice system works and serves the people came from involved community members (see below).

- The first "Children's Court" was developed in 1899 in Chicago by community activist Jane Addams
- Probation was started in Boston by Shoemaker John Augustus who bailed out youth ranging from 7 - 15 years

- Jane Addams and John Augustus represent the historical role of community members providing cutting edge leadership within youth justice reform movements of the past
- A community activist and shoemaker with no institutional authority were able to make lasting contributions to reform that to this day are still fundamental components of youth justice systems across the nation

**What contributions to reform will you inspire?** The information above is just one example of how meaningful engagement with the community keeps our criminal justice system just, fair, and equitable. There's more to be done, and it starts with ongoing information sharing and relationship building between Lake County criminal justice system stakeholders and Lake County community members.



- It allows us to create space for under-resourced populations and **those directly impacted by the issues that we hope to change to have agency and positional power to make decisions** that ultimately affects their respective communities.
- Because of the disenfranchisement/oppression of certain groups, community engagement gives these groups **a process for healing and strengthening** the connections they need to thrive.
- It **creates an environment for systems change**, as it creates an opportunity for pre-existing narratives about communities and their involvement with system agents to change.

Content Creator: [Nexus Community Partners](#)

## On What Issues are Lake County Criminal Justice System Stakeholders Engaging the Lake County Community?

As was noted in the last two newsletters, Lake County criminal justice system stakeholders are working on joint strategies to safely reduce the Lake County jail population and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities. More specifically, the Lake County Equity Team has identified failure to appear warrants (FTAs) as a priority population on which to focus and understand how FTAs

contribute to the jail population and racial disparities. These are some components of the Safety and Justice Challenge Initiative.

## **Pillars of the Initiative**



In addition to safely reducing the jail population and eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, the other two components of the initiative are community engagement and data collection.

Some of the data on jail admission rates were shared last month. Now the focus is to get more data on FTAs and understand the local decisions that lead to the issuance of a failure to appear warrant, who is most impacted, and if there are opportunities to adjust the process safely.

On the community engagement front, we are only just getting started by honing in on community awareness (e.g., this newsletter) and data collection (focus groups - read on!).

# Community Engagement Strategies

- **Community Awareness**
  - Provide information to the community about the local reform efforts
    - Community Forums
    - Tabling at Community Events
    - Community “Coach Ups” on Justice Related Topics
- **Data Collection**
  - Utilize qualitative methods of data collection
    - Focus groups/Interviews/Surveys
    - Circles
    - Community Mapping

Last year, the Lake County Equity Team used Safety and Justice Challenge grant money to fund two experienced focus group facilitators to conduct three focus groups and several interviews with members of the Lake County community who have been directly and indirectly impacted by the local criminal justice system. In September 2020, the focus group facilitators submitted a report to the Lake County criminal justice system stakeholders with findings and recommendations.

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## What Were the Findings From the Focus Groups?

This newsletter! Among other insights and recommendations, this newsletter was inspired by the recommendations in the report from participants of the focus groups, but the focus group report deserves its own newsletter (next month!). In the meantime, as a preview, here is a reflection from Brandon Ewing, who is one of the 57 community members who participated in the focus groups from last year.



Achieving racial equity would mean eliminating the disproportionate impact of our prison system on communities of color and embracing the tenets of restorative justice to repair harm and provide restoration versus only the punishment of actions.

**BRANDON EWING**

**A BIG THANKS to Brandon for sharing his thoughts, and thank YOU ALL for reading!**



# Proud to be a part of the Safety and Justice Challenge. #RethinkJails

You can help inform and engage the community about this work by forwarding this newsletter to three friends and encouraging them to [sign up here](#).

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The Safety and Justice Challenge strategies at Lake County, IL are proudly led and supported by:

Lake County Sheriff's Office

Lake County State's Attorney Office

19th Judicial Circuit Court

Lake County Public Defender's Office

Nicasa Behavioral Health Services

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This project was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over-incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.





**SAFETY+JUSTICE**  
CHALLENGE

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